

## **Comments re:recent articles**

I just wanted to add some comment about feedback from some of my recent articles printed in the press and re-printed in Bangla-Sydney.

I apologise for not being able to respond to all of them as well as e-mails received. As a result it is easier to write en masse and have it published on the site.

I commend people involving themselves in debates as I think we do not have a culture of free and frank discussion. It is the contestability of ideas that go to the heart of a vibrant society and is one of the key needs in Bangladesh today.

First of all, it does appear that the Gold Coast murder was very much a gruesome killing orchestrated by the young girl. This is absolutely shocking, even more shocking than the scenario first postulated and the basis of my "Draw Back the Veil" article in the Courier Mail. Incidentally, titles are determined by editors and not myself. On that basis, I cannot use this incident as justification for some of my comments.

However, that is not to say I don't very much agree with my comments anyway. It was that I felt very strongly when I first heard about the incident and felt compelled to write about it.

It is crazy to say that religion and culture have nothing to do with human behaviour. Along with economics and genetics, it has everything to do with human behaviour. The entire spectrum of human behaviour, along with violence, has everything to do with these factors. The reader who wrote that it didn't has some interesting views on what factors contribute to human actions then.

As such, I think the dynamics of shame and honour have very much to do with the behaviour of many ethnic communities, and indeed Bangladeshis. How much of what Bangladeshis preach is related to "shomaan" or perceived prestige. This is crucial to understanding social dynamics.

Furthermore, this dynamic is very much based from village based clan systems, which is still the basis of our culture. Bangladesh is only barely urbanized and just because you came here as a skilled migrant and lived in the city doesn't suddenly mean that you have overcome this cultural norm. It is not meant as an insult, but an indicator that we very much have a collectivist outlook. Again, there are many positives from such an outlook, but at its extreme, it can undermine the concept of individual rights which is at the heart of democracy and the West. The vast majority of peoples around the world have this collectivist outlook and it is closely related to agricultural economies. I can't go into great detail here, but to say that what we may call Bangladeshi culture is very much tied to rural life and a clan family structure.

I am not an expert of Islam and nor do I profess to be. I am interested in human behaviour. In that I am only interested in Islam in how it contributes to politics and social

systems. This can be readily observed. While it may not reflect what someone else may perceive as 'true Islam', it can certainly be commented upon as part of justifications for people's behaviour. Islam's overlap and contribution to social and political systems is very important in determining the fate of millions of people worldwide, not least in Bangladesh. You do not need to be a theologian or expert in Quranic studies to comment on this. The vast majority of Muslims are not Quranic experts but still behave in certain ways, part of which is related to their idea of Islam.

The heart of the integration debate is that we cannot build an ethnic community based largely on our differences to the mainstream anymore. This is one of the biggest debates in the world today and relate to what values should underpin human societies, how much difference is acceptable and the vexed question of terrorism.

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